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ABSTRACT

In 1991, Saint Mary's University (SMU) (Canada) and Beijing Normal University (BNU) (China) began an 18-month joint teacher education project intended to meet professional needs of BNU foreign language teachers. The project had three components: professional development of teachers; adaptation of the existing national curriculum to meet special needs of prospective English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teachers; and creation of a professional resource library to support the adapted curriculum. Three goals were established: design the curriculum; provide professional development to implement and sustain it; and provide appropriate instructional materials. An agreement between the funding and implementing agencies outlined the responsibilities of each party. Materials and curriculum development were undertaken with close collaboration of Canadian and Chinese educators. A reading curriculum and a writing curriculum were designed, with input from both Chinese and Canadian professionals on content. Methodological concerns and other issues were addressed at this time. Three other activities helped shape the new curricula: an opportunity for two Canadians to teach second- and third-year writing classes; piloting of the writing course with first-year students; and creation of a professional resource library. Problems encountered include communication difficulties, lack of Chinese teacher release time, and logistics. Overall, success was achieved beyond expectations. (MSE)

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The Canada/China Teacher Education Project: A Chinese Initiative

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ABSTRACT

In 1991, Saint Mary's University (SMU) and Beijing Normal University (BNU) began an 18-month joint teacher education project intended to meet a wide range of professional needs of teachers in the Foreign Languages Department at BNU. The project which was sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), had three components: the professional development of teachers, the adaptation of the existing national curriculum for the special needs of prospective English teachers, and the creation of a professional resource library to support and sustain the adapted curriculum.

This paper describes how the project was established and evaluates its success in meeting its goals. The overriding challenge was the continual search for common ground as Chinese and Canadian team members sought to compromise their differing perspectives on language teaching and teacher education.

1.0 Introduction

Second language teacher education in China is changing. In the last few years pressure has been mounting for reform in the preparation of the country's English language teachers. In the fall of 1990, a report by SEDC (the State Education Development Commission) criticized the English language teacher education programs in China, noting the weak results of teacher trainees on national exams. Later that year, at a conference for normal universities in China, Beijing Normal University (BNU) took up the challenge to adapt the national curriculum for the English language teacher education programs.

In the spring of 1991, representatives from the Foreign Languages Department (FLD) at BNU and the Faculty of Education at Saint Mary's University (SMU) met to map out strategies to develop an English language teacher education program (TEP) that would strengthen the FLD program, provide a model for other normal universities in China and develop materials appropriate for students at normal universities. From the onset, the TEP was a Chinese initiative supported by the Canadian side of the Canada/China Language and Cultural Program, a CIDA-sponsored (Canadian International Development Agency) program. It has potentially far-reaching benefits for the teaching of English throughout China.

This report chronicles the development and implementation of an

English language teacher education program as an example of how one Chinese university set itself the task of making a significant change in close consultation with Canadian TEFL professionals.

2.0 The Planning Stages of the Teacher Education Program (TEP)

2.1 Aims and Focus:

As identified in initial meetings between the Foreign Languages Department of BNU and the Faculty of Education of SMU in the spring of 1991, the major goals of the TEP were to assist the FLD in modifying the SEDC curriculum to suit the needs of the English major students who are preparing to be English language teachers.

During the time Saint Mary's was to be involved in the project, the principal goals were:

A. to design curriculum and acquire new materials for the teaching of reading and writing in the first two years of the teacher education program;

B. to provide the professional development needed to implement and sustain the adapted curriculum;

C. to provide materials needed for teaching the revised curriculum as well as TEFL resource materials for the Foreign Languages Department.

These goals were to be accomplished by the end of the project in December 1992.

2.2 Organizational Structure:

On December 17, 1990, an agreement stating the general aims of the project was signed by BNU, SMU, SEDC, and CIDA. A few months later, Dr. Terry Piper, the Canadian Project Leader, visited the FLD. The purpose of her visit was to work with the FLD to refine the goals and aims of the TEP that had been agreed to in December.

At those meetings, it was decided that the Canadian administrators in consultation with the Chinese, would hire two experts to work in China and one materials consultant to be based at Saint Mary's but make several trips to meet with staff at BNU. The two experts hired in the summer of 1991, Dr. William McEachern and Dr. Nancy Yildiz, were to work on site at BNU and function as "coaches" for the FLD faculty and have the following responsibilities:

1. to provide short, theoretically focused introductions to the skill areas;

2. to set up skill teams to meet on a regular basis to evaluate commercially available materials, discuss curriculum design, materials development, and teaching methodology and evaluation;

3. to arrange individual counselling sessions with faculty members;

4. to set up teacher observation and/or practice teaching sessions;

5. to offer basic courses in writing and testing;

6. to oversee the assessment of the reading and writing skills

of the first and second year English language majors at BNU; this was intended to assist them in reaching decisions about changes to courses and content.

The Canadian materials consultant, Dr. Jane Jackson Fahmy, was to have the following duties:

1. to meet with BNU teachers formally and informally in Beijing to determine their views about the material that they were already using in their reading and writing courses;

2. to observe classes in session at BNU to become more familiar with how their reading and writing materials were being used;

3. to conduct workshops with reading and writing teachers to present new material in these subject areas;

4. to order materials (reading, writing, professional development, and other English language material) to support the new curriculum and develop a new resource library;

5. to maintain a complete inventory and financial accounting for materials purchased with a total budget of $70,000.00 Canadian.

For the Chinese side, Wu Zunmin was identified as the chief FLD counterpart to work with the Canadian coaches. Her responsibilities were:

1. to organize the Reading and Writing Committee meetings;

2. to provide feedback to the Canadian coaches;

3. to act as a culture broker for the Canadian professionals and Chinese teachers;

4. to provide feedback to Chinese administrators about the progress of the TEP.

5. to work closely with the Canadian coaches in the design and implementation of the reading and writing curricula.

3.0 Stage 1: Professional Development Activities

Throughout the Teacher Education Project close cooperation between the Canadian and Chinese educators was essential. This was particularly true for the professional development activities which began in September 1991 when McEachern, the first Canadian coach, arrived at BNU. Initially, the professional development activities were seen as part of the orientation period, and included classroom observations by the Canadian coach. These classroom observations introduced the Canadian coach to Chinese teaching methods, materials and attitudes towards the teaching of English. Similarly, demonstration lessons by McEachern and, much later, the videos on language teaching methodologies introduced the Chinese teaching staff to Canadian teaching methods, materials and attitudes.

In her first visit to BNU in December 1991, the Canadian materials consultant conducted several workshops with the reading and writing teachers to present new materials and gather information about the kinds of materials the FLD faculty needed, wanted and would be able to use successfully. Demonstration lessons by McEachern using these new materials were usually followed by a discussion with Chinese colleagues about their suitability and adaptability to the Chinese context. These activities served to lay the foundation for the development and shaping

of the reading and writing curricula, which began when the second coach, Nancy Yildiz, arrived in January 1992.

4.0 Stage 2: The Curriculum Development Process

The development of the reading and writing curricula started with three basic assumptions: 1) input and participation of the Chinese faculty was crucial to the success of the project; b) the creation of a positive work environment was needed to achieve the project objectives; and c) time was of the essence since most of the Chinese team members could only contribute between two and four hours per week because of other commitments.

Collaboration, negotiation and flexibility were deemed to be essential factors to the success of the project. To encourage this, a decision was taken by the two Canadian coaches to develop the curriculum on huge wall charts, using adhesive memo pad paper to record individual and team ideas, opinions, philosophies and concerns over changes being made. This provided several advantages. First, the approach had a highly visual appeal to the Chinese team members, who could easily track the daily progress of the curriculum project. Second, the approach encouraged maximum input from the Chinese and Canadians in the team meetings. Both sides listened and every effort was made to record all views on the wall charts. Third, the approach was flexible. Nothing was cast in stone. The use of adhesive memo

paper allowed additions, deletions or revisions to be easily made as circumstances changed. Fourth, it provided a way of keeping the faculty and administrators informed of the project's progress.

Table 1

The Writing Curriculum **The Reading Curriculum**

Content	Concerns
personal letters informal letters personal → academic writing	Role of journal writing
Methodology fluency and accuracy issues group compositions	**Research Questions** ?

Content	Concerns
more variety too many short stories	speed reading level of questions
Methodology pre-post activities what kind are effective?	**Research Questions** ?

The starting point in the development of the reading and writing curricula was huge blank walls charts divided into four grids: content, methodology, issues/concerns and research questions as shown in Table 1. These grids were used as a framework to identify and organize information given by all involved in the curriculum changes. The process was one of brainstorming and recording the information in the

appropriate grids. It worked well for three of the four categories. Common ground was identified where Canadian and Chinese could start to shape the curricula (e.g., content selection); other areas were identified where negotiations would probably be required (e.g. teaching methodology). The fourth category on research questions was included to encourage individual or team research, but this did not materialize because of lack of support at the administrative level.

4.1 Content Specification

The specification of the content for the reading and writing curricula was the first area to be addressed by both teams. The Chinese had strong views on what content changes were needed and what was possible within the National Curriculum guidelines. For example, the reading team identified the need to shift the content focus away from the reading of short-stories to include a wide range of texts, e.g., non-fiction, academic, newspapers. The writing team felt that the extension of the writing curriculum to include first year students would allow a more comprehensive coverage of basic writing skills. For example, an introduction to personal letters, notes and paragraphs could be covered in first year and more formal letters and essays of personal opinion could be covered in second year. Such changes they perceived would better prepare the students for the National English Language Examination, which is held at the end of the second year.

Hence, through weekly discussions and brainstorming sessions over a two month period, the details of the content areas were worked out, recorded on wall charts, and then organized by year and semesters. Many of the decisions related to these content changes were influenced by the on-going review of materials by the reading and writing teams. Subsequently, course objectives were developed following a similar process.

4.2 Shaping the Curricula: Concerns and Issues

Once the content was specified, the second stage of the process was to look at teaching methodology and other concerns or issues that would impact on the curricula.

In the writing curriculum, the concerns listed in Table 1 suggested some dissatisfaction with the traditional model of writing which emphasizes the product of writing rather than the process. Subsequent discussions and demonstration lessons by Canadians revealed a positive attitude on the part of the Chinese members of the writing team toward the incorporation of a process approach to writing in the curriculum. They also made it clear, however, that correct usage of English structure and grammar would need to be a major component.

An introductory section of the revised curriculum contained a detailed rationale for the proposed change, including an overview of the writing process and its implications for teaching and learning. Further

support was given in the form of teaching suggestions for pre- and post writing activities within each writing module as well as ways to deal with language use problems in student writing.

A similar process was followed in the development of the reading curriculum. Major concerns were identified, such as the need to move away from an emphasis on language analysis in reading comprehension, and the need to raise the consciousness of teachers about the importance of pre-and post-reading activities in the comprehension process. This latter point was cited by teachers who had observed McEachern's demonstration lessons. It was obvious that his lessons had had a significant impact. Teachers had become aware of alternative teaching methods and attitudes toward the teaching of reading and indicated a willingness to incorporate some of the ideas into their own teaching.

Another development was the decision to make a clear distinction between the purpose of the "extensive" and "intensive" reading courses offered at BNU. The intensive course would continue, as in the past, to focus on an analysis of language use which Chinese teachers felt was important. The extensive reading course, for which we were developing the curriculum, would focus on reading for meaning. It would address the teaching of such reading skills as making predictions or inference, identifying main ideas, evaluating arguments, and distinguishing fact

from opinion. In this way, the solution, like that in the development of the writing curriculum, was a blend of Chinese and Canadian beliefs and practices.

The format of each curriculum was similar in that content was organized by genre or mode of writing, followed by an inventory of skills and teaching suggestions. For example, the reading curriculum for first year was organized around the reading of personal narratives, short stories, daily literature (schedules, brochures) and non-fiction articles in the areas of health, sports, and education, etc. In second year, the emphasis shifts to autobiographies, other non-fiction texts and an introduction to academic material.

The rationale for the proposed changes was included in the introductory section along with key points of methodology. This was supplemented by reference to in-house materials appropriate to each unit.

4.3 Support Activities

Three other activities helped support and shape the curricula. One was the opportunity for the two Canadians to teach second and third year writing classes, while working on curriculum development. This was beneficial because it gave them a clearer understanding of the teaching conditions at BNU and the language abilities and interests of the English major students. It also helped them plan realistic objectives,

select appropriate resource materials, and try out many of the suggested classroom activities that were included in the curriculum.

The second was the piloting of the writing course with first year students by one of the Chinese teachers while the details of the curriculum were being worked out. This was done in close collaboration with one of the Canadian coaches through weekly planning and feedback sessions. This provided valuable input into what was happening in the classroom and why. In many ways, these sessions were consciousness-raising ones for both the Chinese and the Canadians who were becoming more aware of alternative approaches, methods and techniques that can work in the classroom.

The third was the creation of a professional resource library to support the new curricula. It was decided to amalgamate the British Council library with our Canadian collection to form a large centre for the use of teachers and graduate students of the FLD. A library committee formed at BNU with Chinese, Canadian, and British professionals working together to make decisions about such aspects as physical layout, the cataloguing of materials, and library regulations. In-Magic, a computerized database system, was selected to facilitate the cataloguing of the library materials. A Chinese librarian was then hired to oversee the cataloguing and organization of the TESL/TEFL reference texts and

student materials, sets of reading and writing texts, novels, and audio cassettes to accompany short stories and other readings.

4.4 The Feedback Process

Drafts of the curriculum were prepared by the Canadian coaches and then circulated to Chinese team members and other senior teaching staff who considered suggested changes and additions carefully before making comments to the counterpart to relay to the Canadian coaches. The Canadian coaches only listened and then met on their own to discuss what was possible and practical. Their views were then relayed back to the Chinese teaching staff. Once agreement was achieved, changes were made and the curricula were translated into Chinese.

5.0 Stage 3: The Implementation Stage

The remaining five months of the project from August to December, 1992 focused on the refinement and testing of the curricula in first and second year classes. Yildiz did some of the teaching herself and assisted the three Chinese teachers with the implementation of the new curricula.

Similar to the approach used in the curricular development process, huge wall charts were used to map out topics for the term as well as the weekly lesson plans. The planning of these lessons evolved from the previewing of the new texts which had recently arrived from Canada, the identification of the objectives of the weekly lessons, as

well as the development of pre-and post-activities which would be most appropriate for the selected texts. Included in these planning meetings was the on-going previewing of materials appropriate for speed reading ad comprehension as well as the teaching and practising of various reading skills. The wall charts helped everyone visualize a master plan for the semester and determine what could be realistically accomplished in a given time period.

The outcome of these planning sessions was successful according to both the teachers and the students. Two factors greatly contributed to this. One was the positive attitude of the Chinese teaching staff to the proposed changes. They were willing to accept change and to risk innovation (e.g. a process approach to writing and an interactive approach to reading for comprehension). The second was a willingness of the Chinese staff to work closely with Yildiz in the previewing and selection of materials, and in the planning of the weekly lessons. This was truly a collaborative effort!

6.0 Evaluation

6.1 Limitations:

Looking back at the past two and one half years, we can truthfully say that the end product was worth the many frustrations we encountered especially in corresponding from such a distance. Communication sometimes broke down and in the beginning, it often

seemed as though the FLD was constantly changing its mind about goals and desired outcomes. In retrospect, this was largely a misunderstanding of the different ways of proceeding between Canadian and Chinese cultures.

Perhaps, the major limitation of the project was the lack of release time for the Chinese counterpart and other colleagues to work full-time with the Canadian coaches during the development of the curricula. Shortage of teaching staff was the main reason for this. As a result, the meeting of project deadlines was due to the willingness of a few key Chinese teachers to put in long hours before and after teaching.

The business of dealing with publishers, bookstores, customs agents, and shippers was especially trying. Materials did not arrive on schedule and, sometimes, could not be traced immediately. Unfortunately, events that prevented early arrival were entirely outside the control of either BNU or SMU.

6.2.1 Successes:

A. Professional Development. The notion of coaching introduced into the project by the FLD in the spring 1991 planning meetings, was the most important component of the TEP because it introduced FLD teachers to Canadian teaching methods, materials and attitudes toward the teaching of English that eventually went into the shaping of the curriculum. Moreover, and equally importantly, it provided the Canadian

team members with a better understanding of Chinese teaching methods and materials as well as Chinese teachers' attitudes toward teaching.

Chinese teachers also told us that they derived direct benefits from the professional development activities quite independent of the new curriculum. Evidence for this last point was that many teachers not teaching in the English major section and thus not affected by the curricular changes attended professional development sessions.

6.2.2 The Reading and Writing Curriculum. This is by far the most tangible part of the project; it is a long document consisting of a rationale and concrete plans for teaching English reading and writing to English majors during their first two years of study. It is now complete and in use at BNU. The following section provides an overview of the highlights of our curricular accomplishment and process.

a. Resource Materials. The acquisition of materials was seen initially only as a component of the curriculum process. During the course of the project, however, it took on a life of its own, and the resource centre which was established at BNU in the course of this project is likely one of the best and most up-to-date in all of China. It truly supports the new curricula and provides a broader selection of teaching and learning materials.

As a result of efforts by both Chinese and Canadian team members, the Teacher and Post-graduate Resource Centre now houses

the English language professional development materials. Furthermore, at the request of Chinese teachers and students, the project helped to create and support a Self-access Reading and Study Room for first and second year English majors. This room, which opened in February 1993, has over 500 titles in stock with several multiple copies which can serve as class sets. It is one of the most rewarding aspects of this project since previously, first and second year students had not been permitted to borrow English language materials.

b. Reform. The reading curriculum represents a notable change from past practice. First, the weekly two-hour block previously assigned to extensive reading was divided into two parts: 100 minutes each week for an instructional reading course and 20 minutes for speed reading. One hour each week was added to the total, this time to be devoted to the English novel. This innovative practice has proven so popular with Chinese students that teachers have found it difficult to keep up with the demand for new titles of both classical and modern novels.

Before this project, writing had not been taught to first year students, and in the second year only foreign teachers had been involved. Initially, the BNU teachers were very reluctant to teach writing skills. One Chinese teacher did agree to work closely with the Canadian coaches and piloted a very successful writing course for first year students. Her efforts provided encouragement for other Chinese teachers

to take an active role in the writing courses, rather than rely exclusively on Western teachers.

c. **National Examination results.** While the response of the Chinese teachers and students has been extremely positive to the new curricula, the real test of how effective the project has been will come with national examination results over the next few years. Preliminary results are encouraging.

1. Results from the national examination in June of 1992 show that nearly 30% more BNU students at the end of year one passed the writing portion of the examination than ever before. These students had been taught writing by Canadians and by Wang Xing, one of the BNU teachers, using the writing curriculum then in progress.
2. The popularity of the novel-reading course has meant that students are reading more in English, a fact that should lead to improved results in the 1993 national examinations.

d. **Continuation of modifications.** The participation of so many Chinese teachers in the curriculum development process not only ensured its success but greatly increased the likelihood that the adaptation process will continue into the other skill areas and into the third and fourth years of study. There is little doubt that the FLD now has the expertise to continue the process of curricular study and change.

Moreover, the efforts made by the Canadian coaches to work closely with the Chinese teachers has ensured that ownership for the work be assumed by the Chinese.

e. A Collaborative Approach. The reading and writing curricula, which successfully blends Canadian and Chinese belief and practice, would never have come about without the extensive input of the Chinese teachers. Working without released time or other compensation, they participated fully in the project, assuming the ownership that was rightfully theirs. We mention this to underscore our view of Saint Mary's role in the process: we were facilitators and consultants and, to some degree, organizers but the primary impetus for change and credit for its success belongs to the dedicated teachers of the FLD.

7.0 Conclusion

All participants in the project, both Chinese and Canadians, view the project as an overwhelming success, beyond our expectations. The central aims of the project, as articulated in 1991, have been met. Moreover, they have been met on schedule and within the budget allotted to the project. Proof of success resides in the reading and writing curricula and in the simple fact that it is currently in use at BNU.

Teacher education reform can face many problems: tradition, bureaucracy, and fear of change to name a few. The TEP we have

described argues for a joint venture where local and foreign professionals work side by side for common goals. Those who are willing to take the initiative can provoke change. While the groundwork for curricular reform in English language teacher education in China has been laid at BNU, the true measure of the success of this program will be in its effect on the long-term development of teacher education, not only in Beijing, but throughout China.